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UNCLAS HARARE 000517

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

STATE FOR AF/S
NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR JFRAZER

E. O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR CALLED TO MFA OVER NEW SANCTIONS

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1. (SBU) Ambassador Sullivan was called to a meeting on March 11 by Ambassador Joey Bimha, Divisional Head - Europe and America, of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Although Ambassador Bimha would not disclose the purpose of the meeting in advance, after a few courtesies he immediately asked for an explanation of the Executive Order of March 7 targeting financial assets of President Mugabe and 76 other GOZ officials. Ambassador Sullivan explained the Executive Order, restated the prevailing American concern about continued violations of human and civil rights, and delivered a copy of the text.

2. (SBU) Ambassador Bimha stated that he and his ministry were open to dialogue and expressed the hope that dialogue would somehow lead to an end to the current political impasse. However, when discussing the possibility of dialogue with the opposition party Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), he blamed the opposition party for the breakdown in inter-party dialogue. He remained adamant that no dialogue was possible as long as the MDC continued to pursue its court challenge of the 2002 presidential elections.

3. (SBU) Comment. The most significant aspect of this conversation was Ambassador Bimha's expressions of surprise that economic sanctions had finally been imposed. Despite a year's worth of USG and international censure of Zimbabwe's human rights violations, civil rights violations, humanitarian catastrophe, economic implosion, political crisis, and despite frequent USG warnings of impending financial sanctions, the diplomat feigned astonishment that the USG's clearly stated intentions had finally matured into explicit action. This also fits with the slowness of GOZ reaction to USG financial sanctions. Except for an anonymous GOZ official's claim to Reuters International that the sanctions were a white racist reaction to land redistribution, the US financial sanctions went unreported and without comment in the state media until the night of Tuesday, March 11. The explanations given that US sanctions were somehow a favor to the British and a part of Iraq policy were bizarre. How to explain GOZ wrong-footedness? Perhaps they have been reading too much of their own propaganda that the French invitation to Mugabe and South African/Nigerian advocacy for ending Commonwealth sanctions were great Zimbabwean triumphs signaling the accommodation of the world to Zimbabwean reality. Oh well -- back to the drawing board. End comment.